



Anglo-Catholic:

What is it?

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A NATIONAL GUILD OF CHURCHMEN TRACT

The name “Anglo-Catholic” seems to a good many who accept it, to be not too fortunate. To pretty much everyone who does not understand its true significance (and few do) the name is misleading. It has caused misunderstanding and has given plausibility to misrepresentations, mostly, it may be, believed sincerely by those who make them. This confusion is heightened by the fact that the ceremonial and vestments employed are more like those used in Roman churches than is the case in “Evangelical” Episcopal churches. It is sometimes assumed, quite wrongly, that this is done in order to “ape Rome.”

Many are ready to condemn Anglo-Catholics, but few indeed care to inquire why Anglo-Catholics exist. What moves these people to be what they are? What are they after?

Anglo-Catholics have a vision. It seems to them a glorious vision which all would share if only they could catch sight of it.

The Anglo-Catholic is a member of the Anglican Communion and, in the United States, of the Episcopal Church, who is acutely aware of being a Catholic and happy to be one. For this he can not be read out of the Episcopal Church since the Episcopal Church, with the whole Anglican Communion, has always claimed to be Catholic, and this claim is maintained by low churchmen as well as high. The Anglo-Catholic differs from the general run of Episcopalians in that the general run care little for the Catholicity of their Church, seeing that they do not understand it, while to the Anglo-Catholic it is the breath of life.

And that leads directly to the question: What is Catholic? Definitions do not help much.

Catholicity is one of the constant marks of THE CHURCH. THE CHURCH does not mean any particular "Church." This is recognized on the title page of our Prayer Book, which says that the book contains the common prayer, sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of THE CHURCH, according to the use (practice) of the Episcopal Church. In the Nicene Creed we say we believe in a Church which is One and Apostolic as well as Catholic. Evidently we must understand the Catholicity of THE CHURCH as related to its unity and its apostolicity.

Thus the problem of unity confronts us. And as we consider the state of the Christian world as it now is, we appear to be baffled. Yet beneath the surface a unity may be found. The statement on the title page of our Prayer Book, referred to above, offers a clue. There is common prayer of THE CHURCH. There are sacraments of THE CHURCH. And there are other rites and ceremonies of THE CHURCH. There is also the Apostolic ministry of THE CHURCH, as is strongly emphasized in the Preface to our Ordinal (Prayer Book, page 529).

If one uses the Anglican definition of "sacrament," ordination is one of the "Other Rites and Ceremonies." If one uses the Roman and Orthodox definition, it is one of the sacraments. Calling things by different names does not make them different things, although it often misleads people into thinking that they are different things. Similarly, The Holy Communion of the Anglicans, the Holy Liturgy of the Orthodox, and the Holy Mass of the Roman Catholics, are all the same thing. A common name

is *The Eucharist*, derived from a Greek word signifying thanksgiving.

All Christian bodies, even if they refuse to speak to each other, which have in common the common prayer and sacraments and rites and ceremonies of THE CHURCH, evidently are bound together in a certain unity, and all bodies of Christians which have lost some or all of the common things may, by doing what is necessary to recover them, enter into the same unity. Herein lies the hope cherished by those called Anglo-Catholics.

There is a unity in common possession, especially of sacred things. The Anglican Communion, including the Episcopal Church, possesses all of the sacred things of the Christian religion in common with the Orthodox Churches (the Greek and other Eastern bodies), the Roman Catholic Church, and some smaller bodies, such as the Old Catholics. This statement can not be made truly of the bodies comprised by Protestantism.

This unity seems to have no little significance when thought of in connection with THE CHURCH, whose common prayer and sacraments and other rites and ceremonies our Prayer Book exemplifies in its pages.

The Eucharist culminates in Holy Communion, one of the two sacraments enjoined by our Lord in express terms. Always the priest tells all communicants that what they are receiving is the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. The act of communion is preceded by our prayers and oblations. At the Offertory the bread and wine, symbols of our means of livelihood, are offered to God and they remain on the altar throughout, becoming the sacramental Body and Blood

of Christ, thus re-presenting before the Father our Lord's Sacrifice of Himself on the Cross. Besides these offerings, we offer to God our praise and thanksgiving and ourselves, our souls and bodies. So we come to the altar as suppliants, having offered all to God. All this offering is the Eucharistic Sacrifice (or "Sacrifice of the Mass").

These things are done in almost every Episcopalian church every Sunday and throughout the Anglican Communion and the Roman Communion and the Orthodox Communion and the Old Catholic and other Catholic bodies. All are one in the Holy Sacrifice and in the Holy Communion, even though some of us hardly speak to others of us.

While the general run of Episcopalian are perhaps not very conscious of these things, the Anglo-Catholics are acutely and happily aware of them. And they are aware also that this unity in prayer and sacrament is so inextricably intertwined with another element of unity that, without that other, it would not and could not exist. That other element is the apostolicity of THE CHURCH.

The apostolicity of THE CHURCH is its identity with the Apostolic Church, which is the Church directed by the Apostles themselves after they took over when their Lord Jesus Christ departed leaving them to carry on. THE CHURCH is that very same Church, sadly divided but still existing. It is the only Church that ever was, is, or can be. The Episcopal Church shares in that Church as a part of it, and that is why it possesses the common prayer and sacraments and ceremonies of THE CHURCH. The Anglo-Catholic is vividly aware of the identity of his Church with the Apostolic

Church of Jesus Christ, an identity shared with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and all other Christian bodies having the common ministry, creeds, sacraments, and worship of THE CHURCH.

This identity with the Apostolic Church has been maintained by receiving, using, and preserving the tradition, that is, the essential beliefs, practices, and constitution of the Apostolic Church handed down from age to age as they were received from the Apostles and developed through the formative early centuries. This is what it is to be Catholic.

Since the Church of the Apostles still exists, and must exist until the end of the world, it is a continuous undying reality imbued with life from on high, the life of the Holy Spirit, wherefore the Church is Holy as well as Catholic and Apostolic, as the creeds attest. A continuous living reality requires a constitution, and a constitution requires a cohesive frame, being the coordinate elements on which it is formed and which hold it together so that it can continue through time.

At first the Apostles were the ministry of THE CHURCH. With expansion and the passage of time additions and successors were needed. Differentiations came about as additions to the ministry were made, some of the new ministers receiving all and some only a part of the Apostolic commission. At an early stage the standardized pattern was developed of bishops, priests, and deacons, and so it has been ever since (Cf. the Preface to the Ordinal, Book of Common Prayer, page 529). This is the ministry of the Anglican Communion including the Episcopal Church, of the Orthodox Church, of the Roman Church, and of all

other bodies of Apostolic succession. This ministry is a principal, if not the principal, cohesive element of the constitution of THE CHURCH, holding things together and maintaining tradition.

To the mind of the Anglo-Catholic it appears to be manifest that without this continuous ministry a so-called Church is not identifiable with the Church of the Apostles. And the Anglo-Catholic can not see himself as a member of a body called a Church, but not Apostolic.

Whenever Protestant bodies will come seeking earnestly in good faith to be endowed with the ministry and sacraments and worship and teachings of THE CHURCH, the Anglo-Catholic will be happy to welcome them. But the Anglo-Catholic can not bring himself to invite the impairment of those things through mergers or consolidations or intercommunion with bodies which do not have them and have not earnestly sought them.

The vestments, ceremonials, and the like used in the Roman Church today are not a peculiarity of the modern Church of Rome. They pertain to the long tradition of THE CHURCH. Of all bodies claiming Apostolicity, the Anglican Communion is the only one that has ever dispensed with those things, as it is the only one that has ever substituted another service (Daily Morning Prayer) for the Eucharist as the principal Sunday service. Conscious as he is of THE CHURCH, the Anglo-Catholic is anxious to do as THE CHURCH has traditionally done. He knows well that a chasuble is far from being of the essence of the Eucharist, but he knows also that celebrating in a surplice and stole, or a rochet and chimere, is far from being the way of THE CHURCH.

Since the Reformation the Anglican Church, through various causes and at various times, has been deprived of some of the accompaniments of traditional corporate worship, and has been brought to substitute to a great extent the office of Daily Morning Prayer (see Prayer Book, page 3) for the Holy Eucharist. The Anglo-Catholic wishes to restore things. Since they are no longer to be found in his Church, he must look elsewhere for a pattern, and the Roman Church is his only practicable recourse. There, these things have been preserved, and that is the whole reason why Anglo-Catholic ceremonial resembles that of Rome.

In matters of manners, modes of speech, and the like, everyone is unreflectingly of the opinion that any noticeable deviation from what he is thoroughly accustomed to, is wrong. Thus it is not surprising that usually the Evangelical churchman is displeased when he encounters the high church ceremonial. Moreover, he is in the position of the man who could not see the forest for the trees. Each separate unaccustomed thing impresses him as distinct from the whole and he is unable to see the service whole. If he would make it a point to attend a service of this kind for six or seven successive Sundays, his impression would be altered radically. The purpose of this setting for the service is, that the worship of God may be conducted with all the beauty and solemnity attainable and the mood of worship intensified. Those accustomed to the procedure find that it achieves its purpose. What takes place is corporate worship. The people respond as one, deeply centred in the worship of Almighty God through this perpetual memory until His coming again, of the precious death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ

(Prayer Book, page 80), and in adoration of His mystical Presence on the altar. "Humbly I adore thee, Deity unseen."

As this discussion aims to be an exposition and not an apologetic, we must pass over sundry accusations sometimes leveled at Anglo-Catholics, as, for example, that of some sort of criminality in using a "missal," which is essentially an expansion of the missal which pages 67 to 269 of the Prayer Book are, and the charge of idolatry in adoration of the reserved Sacrament. But it must be said that, speaking accurately, nobody adores the Sacrament. Adoration in the presence of the Sacrament of the divine Presence, that is, of God, is a corollary of the Real Presence which, as our bishops have reminded us in their pastoral letter of the year 1961, is a doctrine of our Church.

Anglo-Catholics have a vision. It is the vision of the Holy Catholic Church reconstituted, brought together again in one communion and common organization with a common focus. This can never come to pass, they think, through mechanical contrivances such as merger "concordats" based on bargainings as to minimum terms for accepting episcopal ordination and polity without conviction of its necessity. There can be no reconstitution but within the Apostolic tradition. Frank, honest conversations between separated bodies are useful and necessary to expose the true nature and extent of differences and also of the many things held in common. They should not be used as occasions for bargaining, or so the Anglo-Catholic thinks.

The contemporary urge to "oecumenicity" sometimes seems to avert its gaze from Rome.

Yet manifestly there can be no reconstitution of THE CHURCH without Rome. The Roman demand for "submission", and the will to power manifest in and ever since the crowning of Charlemagne, constitute tremendous obstacles. Eagerness for immediate results can hardly bear the thought of this. But the fact remains that no one can envision reconstitution of THE CHURCH with Rome outside.

Does sufficient change in Roman attitudes and contentions and in Protestant attitudes and contentions seem impossible? Manifestly the time is not yet ripe, or nearly so. But the Anglo-Catholic, accused of intransigence because of his unwillingness to compromise essentials and his distrust of bargain-made consolidations, is spellbound by his vision of THE CHURCH reconstituted in the Apostolic tradition, and his urge to haste is tempered by remembering that our Lord has told us that with God all things are possible and by remembering that in God's sight a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

The vision of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church which our Lord turned over to His Apostles to promote and guide, fashions the thinking and living of the Anglo-Catholic, and this is a key to the understanding of his attitudes and his ways. He seeks always to the Faith and to the practices and tradition which have come down and developed through and in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church which our Lord confided to His Apostles and their successors. For the Anglo-Catholic there can be no other Church.

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